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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1804
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0845
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0731
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0026
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001037

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PTER KDEM PHUM PINR BG

SUBJECT: (C) GRAVE CONCERN OVER TERROR GROUP'S POLITICAL
FORAY

REF: A. DHAKA 1025
1B. DHAKA 882

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (S/REL:CAN/AUS/UK/NZ) Summary: The terrorist group Harkatul Jihad al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) is seeking political legitimacy through the launch of a political party. The leaders of the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) insist it is dedicated to establishing what they call a true democracy under & Islamic shariah law. Ambassador Moriarty has told senior Caretaker Government officials that the HuJI-B must not be allowed to enter mainstream politics. The Ambassador will reiterate his views in an upcoming meeting with the Directorate General Intelligence Forces (DGFI), which other sources confirm drove the establishment of the IDP. There is no evidence to suggest HuJI-B has forsaken its violent past.

IDP TO PROMOTE JIHAD, SHARIAH LAW

12. (S/REL:CAN/AUS/UK/NZ) The USG designated HuJI-B a Foreign Terrorist Organization in the Spring of 2008; the Government of Bangladesh had banned it in October 2005 after an assassination attempt on Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina. The core of HuJI-B includes Bangladeshis who fought with the Mujahidin in Afghanistan during the 1980s and received significant training in small arms and use of explosives. HuJI-B has not renounced the use of violence nor renounced its 1998 joining of an al-Qaida Fatwa against the United States.

13. (S/REL:CAN/AUS/UK/NZ) Reporting from other Embassy sources confirmed that Bangladesh's military intelligence agency, DGFI, helped create the IDP, in an attempt to bring purported moderate members of HuJI-B into the political mainstream. The IDP in recent months has engaged in political organizing activities across Bangladesh. Despite claims from party leaders that they advocate peace and democracy, diplomats and government officials remain deeply skeptical. Reports from various sources indicate the party has not left behind its terrorist roots.

14. (SBU) The formal party launch occurred September 26 at an evening event attended by an estimated 2,000 people in Dhaka.

According to a local staff member of the Australian High Commission, many speakers affirmed their acceptance of Bangladesh's Constitution but called for its amendment in an Islamic way.⁸ Sheikh Abdul Salam, himself a veteran Jihadist of the Soviet-Afghan campaign, is head of the IDP convening committee. Salam said that the party & wants to implement Islamic Shariah law in Bangladesh, but not through terrorist activities.⁸ IDP leader Abdul Kuddus, also a former Soviet-Afghan Jihadist and HuJI-B member, earlier was quoted in The Daily Star, the largest English-language newspaper in Bangladesh, as saying the party was & still in a Jihad in the country as we were in the past in Afghanistan against Russia and America. But now we are fighting against evil education, corruption, and communalism.⁸

¶15. (C) At the inauguration, Salah Uddin Shohaib Choudhury, editor of the weekly Blitz magazine, was among those who voiced strong support of the IDP. He reportedly said that if the Bangladesh government tried to ban or limit the activities of the IDP there would be stern retaliation. Choudhury also criticized some foreign missions for trying to label the IDP as a terrorist organization. (Note: Choudhury is well known to the Embassy and is a cause celebre among human rights groups for facing charges of sedition, treason, and blasphemy on allegations of promoting ties with Israel, a country with which Bangladesh does not have diplomatic relations. End note.)

CAN THE IDP LAST?

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¶16. (SBU) The Daily Star reported that Kuddus indicated the IDP would contest Parliamentary elections set for Dec. 18. Provisions of a new electoral ordinance raise doubts about whether the party qualifies. Under the law, a political party cannot qualify if its objectives contradict the national constitution or if it discriminates based on religion, race, caste, language or sex.

¶17. (C) In a September 23 meeting with Home Affairs Adviser Maj. Gen. (retired) M.A. Matin and Home Secretary Abdul Karim, the Ambassador raised the subject of HuJI-B. (reftel A) Both Matin and Karim said they remained committed to countering terrorism and spoke of the need to prevent HuJI-B from regaining strength. Matin commented, &We will crush them.⁸

Comment: A Full-Court Press Against the IDP

¶18. (S/REL:CAN/AUS/UK/NZ) While it is not yet possible to gauge how much support the IDP can garner, the vast majority of Bangladeshis are unsympathetic to terrorist groups such as HuJI-B. Post will continue to express its strong opposition to any attempt to legitimize HuJI-B through the political process. In particular, the Ambassador is seeking a meeting as soon as possible with Brig. Gen. ATM Amin, the head of counterterrorism at DGFI who has reportedly spearheaded efforts to create the IDP supposedly in order to bring purportedly moderate HuJI-B elements into the political mainstream.

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